

Young Ofeg's
Ditties



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YOUNG OFEG'S DITTIES

BY GEORGE EGERTON.

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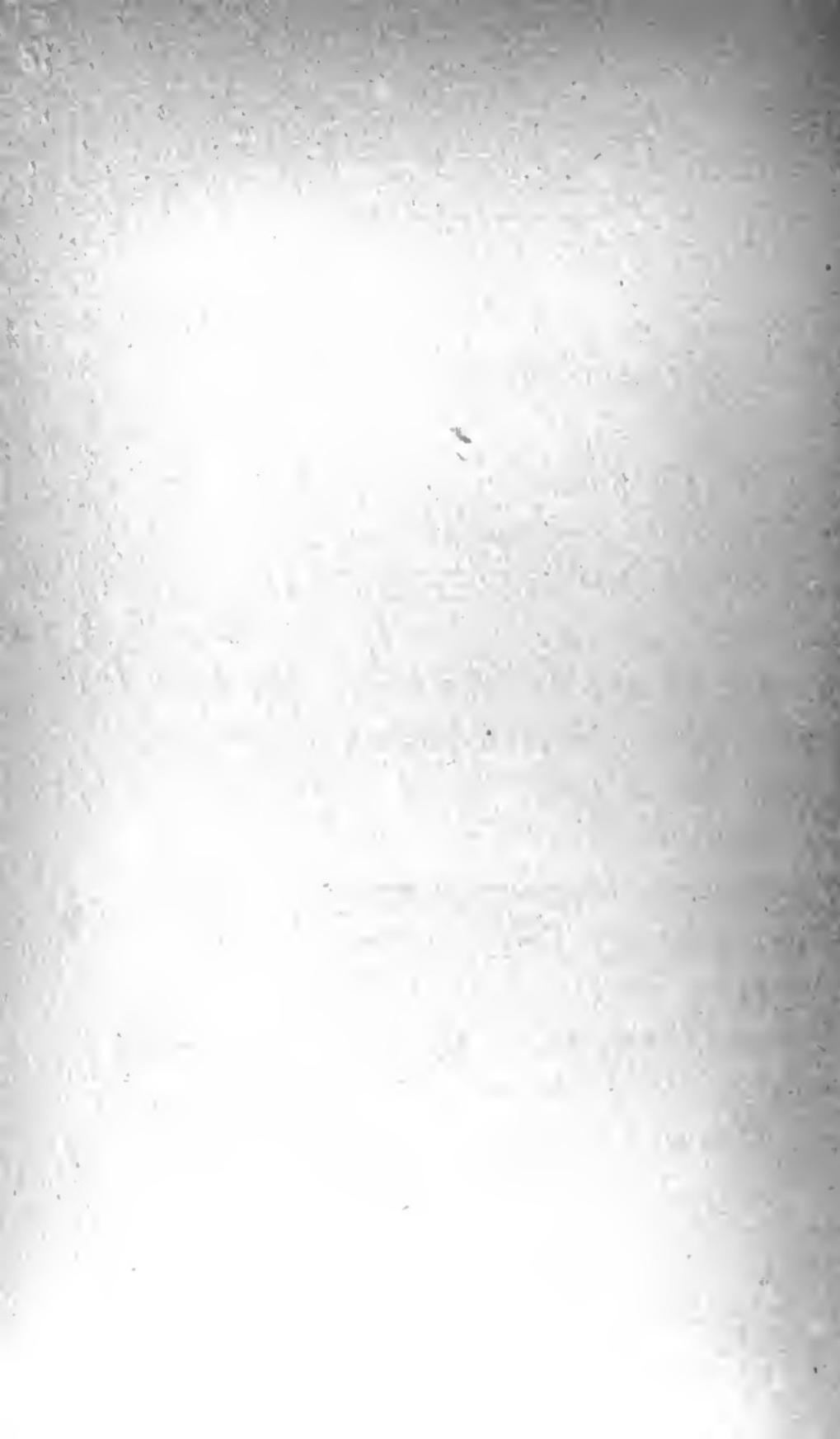
YOUNG OFEG'S DITTIES

BY OLA HANSSON

TRANSLATED FROM
THE SWEDISH BY
GEORGE EGERTON

LONDON: JOHN LANE, VIGO ST
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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

IT has been urged upon me by many that translation is an unworthy form of literature; and with this view I entirely agree, if the translator be not in such sympathy with the writer he endeavours to give in his own tongue, as to make translation a labour of love, and not merely a branch of literary trade. In offering this necessarily poor version of these beautiful prose poems, which are an exposition of Friedrich Nietzsche's triumphant doctrine of the Ego, I am not

alone actuated by my individual admiration of Ola Hansson's writings, but also by a desire to make known to others one of the most remarkable writers of our day.

Ola Hansson is the youngest and most striking personality amongst Scandinavian writers. He was born on the 12th of November 1860, in Skåne (*Scania*), the most southern province in Sweden. His family is one of the oldest in the province, and have held the same estate for many centuries as free-hold proprietors. Herr Ola's father was the first to marry an outsider, and his eldest brother the first to enter a University—for the dis-

tinguishing characteristic of such families in Sweden is jealousy of innovation, tenacity in the preservation of family tradition, and intermarriage. He joined the University at Lund, and passed a brilliant examination in philosophy as one year's student, but the expectation that he would be a shining light as lecturer was not fulfilled, as he devoted himself to letters.

After his return to Skania he issued his first book, "Sensitiva Amorosa," in which he broke new ground in literature: that of physiological mysticism, with which he plumbed greater depths in the mysteries of human life than even the Ibsen, Björnson, or Strindberg

problem-plays had led one to believe possible. As the niceties of his psychology and the peculiar depths of his analysis met, not alone with little understanding, but called down a storm of opprobrium and scurrilous personal attacks from the press, he left his native land and settled finally in Germany; and here he gained in a few years a leading position as poet and critic in the newer school of letters.

His fame spread from Germany to France, where attention was first drawn to him by the publication of "Young Ofeg's Ditties." His numerous lyrical and critical works have been translated into most European languages, and every

new issue of his pen is hailed with eagerness. Most of his work is in striking affinity with the atmosphere of erotic mysticism that pervades the paintings of Mr Burne Jones, so much so that *Amor* and *Psyche*, *King Cophetua*, and *Chant d'Amour* might serve as illustrations of some of Ola Hansson's moods, save that they are lacking a little in the sensuous intensity of the latter's work.

Something of the Skanian atmosphere has crept into his nature: the flat land, the ever-varying delicate nuances of the seasons, the shifting lights, the wayward moods peculiar to each time of the year, all find echo in his impressionable soul.

As poet, psychological novelist, masterly essayist, and individual critic, he is one of the most striking literary phenomena of the age—he is the incarnation of the nervous life of to-day. He is a specialist in psychology, a pathological hunter in the terra incognita of the human soul; laying bare hidden places with the sure, deft touch of a skilled surgeon. He writes by the light of some inner illumination; feels with delicate intellectual antennæ uncommon to ordinary humanity. He is a master in the diagnosis of the elusive emotions that flit like shadows across the hearts and minds of men. His writings are distinguished by

melancholy sentiment, delicate, dainty joy, and sympathetic sorrow with the fruitless struggle of man with adverse circumstances, and the enigmatical forces in his own being. The peculiar rhythm of his prose adapts itself to his moods, fixes the fleeting expressions, the changeful colours, and the scarcely audible undertones of life.

He is an aristocrat in letters, for the few, not the many. “*Sensitiva Amorosa*” and “*Parais*” (*Pariahs*), are the most individual of his many novels; they give the psycho-physiological key to all his subsequent work.

As critic he aims to grip the characteristic, the individual, in a

writer's nature, to probe to the man behind the work—to interpret both. "Interpreters and Seers,"* "Young Scandinavia," "Friedrich Nietzsche, His Personality and His System," with a pamphlet on "Materialism in Belles Lettres," have placed him in the foremost rank as a critic.

As writer he has worked against the heaviest odds. He published most of his earliest works without the slightest pecuniary return—and he has been absolutely true to the principles of his art.

As a man who has seen all, staked all, lost faith, and is yet not embittered, his personality is interesting.

* The translation of this I hope to complete shortly, before undertaking his novels.

*He watches the game of life with a
('tis true) somewhat weary interest,
but his heart is full of pity, and his
noble sensitive soul answers to every
chord in the existence of humanity.
His keenness of vision pertains al-
most to second sight, he reads men,
with the complexity of their motives
and the duality of their being, with
appalling ease. He is a poet—who
is likewise a seer.*

GEORGE EGERTON.



I.



SCANDINAVIA was hushed in the greatness and silence of a winter's night. The sky was thickly studded with stars and the countries slept.

The moon rose. It gleamed upon Sulitelma's crest and up from the white farms in Skåne. The shadows lay in long slants, gliding toward the East softly and imperceptibly, as thoughts that have never found words; and the stars glimmered so vividly, that if a living being had been there he might have heard how they trembled through the silence.

But no living thing appeared in the night, for all things slept: in field and wood, on sea and cabin, in village and town.

Suddenly a form rose up by Kolmården's woods, taller than the tallest pine tree, broad in the shoulders as Kölén's ridge. He cast a shadow across the land like a Titan's pall, and it was so long that it enveloped all

Stockholm, and dropped its other end into the Gulf of Bothnia.

And his eyes had the sinister, furtive look of a criminal's; and when he lifted his face upwards, so that the moonlight fell upon it, it revealed such depths of disquiet and tortured conscience that the shadows paused and the stars ceased to tremble. And the form groaned —groaned with a despair so unspeakable, so unfathomable, that children shrank in their cradles and grown-up folk had bad dreams. And the night stood silently as if waiting to hear something; but no living thing seemed to exist except the solitary figure on Kolmården.

Yet there was another awake: the great Spirit, he who is so great that he can never be seen by mortal eye—by some called Time, by others Fate, by others again Justice or the Judge.

He was reposing in space, Orion's Belt girding his loins, his armpits resting on the wagon pole of Charles' Wain, his hair of grizzled eld streaming out betwixt the hemispheres—

called by men the Milky Way,—and his eye gleamed in his forehead, and the light of it fell through the Northern Night over the solitary figure on Kolmården. “Judas!”—the word echoed through the night with a sound as when stones fall upon ice. Then the figure cowered as under the grip of a giant’s hand, and his eyes stared wildly about him, and a look as of millions of stifled screams of terror gathered upon his face. But the night stood silently around him, and no living being seemed to exist.

“Judas!” it echoed a second time. And he knew not whence the voice came, for the great Spirit is so infinitely great that he can never be seen by mortal eye; and when he looked at the stars that shivered, he thought it was they who had spoken; and when he watched the slanting shadows he thought it was they; and when he noticed the silence and the solitude around him, he made sure that it was their voice and nought else that he had heard.

“Judas!” it echoed for the third time, and

everything spoke, and nothing spoke, and it was outside him, and it was inside him. And then he laughed,—laughed as a man laughs in the madness of terror ; and it echoed through the night, and he listened to his own laugh ; and when a while had passed, it still sounded as if a hundred thousand people were laughing far off in the midst of the sleeping towns.

And again the voice sounded : “What sin have you committed to-day ?”

“I have not sinned to-day,” answered the figure.

“Then why is your conscience troubled ?”

“My conscience is not troubled.”

“Then why did you shrink when you heard my voice ? and why did you groan ? I will tear the bandages off the wounds in your conscience, so you may see that they still bleed ; I will conjure forth all your sins, and they will grip your soul like bloodhounds. So set your heels against the side of the cliff, and wind your arm about the wood, for your legs will sink under you at what you are about to hear.”

Then the figure shivered from the crown of

his head to the soles of his feet, so that Kolmårdens woods bent as if the storm had whirled through them. And he sank upon his knees, and he dashed his head upon the rocks and cried :—

“I am not Judas! I am not Judas!”

“ You are the corpse-blood of life, the corruption of humanity. Your soul is leprous, your heart's blood black, your brain filth. Amongst the children of men there is not one to be found who is such a shame to the race as you. Were one to ransack all prisons and all the dwelling-places of vice—never would one find your equal. For you are the silent conserver, you have kept silent; kept silent all your life, kept silent when you ought to have spoken, bartered your soul for silence' sake, lost your peace of conscience. 'Tis true you never jeered at him who stood in the pillory, but kept silent; you never held the pincers whilst others tore the heart out of the body of the witness to the truth, but you kept silent; you were not amongst those who harnessed pregnant women to your chariot, but

you used them and kept silent; you never lashed your labourers to greater exertion until the blood spurted from the poor broken down wretches, but you looked on while others did it, and you kept silent. You would have kept silent if your own father had been dragged by his grey hairs, your own mother violated in your presence.

“ But mark now my words, when the day of judgment comes, the great day of doom, when all the races of the earth shall be judged, and all the worlds will be empty, and eternity stand waiting in silence and trembling—then I will cause the portals of my mansion to be closed: and I will arise and say: Ye all, no matter what sins ye have committed, they are forgiven ye—ye weak ones who could never resist the tempter, and ye leaders who tempted,—I forgive ye. Purge your hands from impurity and blood, and clothe ye in festive garments, and enter ye into the everlasting joys! I forgive ye, all! All except *one*!

“ And then I will point to you, you silent consenter, and I will cause the doors of my

mansions to be thrown open, and I will shew you the desolate, empty worlds, and say:—You who let injustice be, well knowing it was injustice; you who looked on coldly, although you had hands to help; you who betrayed your brethren by silent consent, when you might have saved them by a word; you who possessed the truth and spake it not; who walked in silence past the interminable row of witnesses crucified for the sake of truth;—you cowardly man of silence, whose name is Judas—forgiveness will never be yours, never in eternity. You shall wander through the desolate spheres, and you will never be able to pause, and you will never find death, and the spheres will never cease to be, and they will be always a little desolate; and the silence will drive you mad, and you shall howl like dogs at midnight, and you shall scream like a man possessed, and shriek with laughter in the madness of terror as you laughed a while ago, but no one will hear you, no one answer you, nought but the echo of your own voice, rolling on through

the dead infinities, the one sound, the one living thing to be found."

The figure sprang up and his shadow fell across the moonlit land like the grotesquely magnified shadow of a human head upon a white wall; and he stretched his hands heavenwards, and his eyes darted out of their sockets, and he fell on his face, crashing like a giant tree. And the dawn flamed, and the cocks crew the land around, and men woke in their beds bathed in a nightmare of sweat.

II.

C



MANKIND seemed trivial and life meaningless. The thoughts of some were lighter than feathers, and of others more void than ether. And although I tested all human efforts under the magnifier, they never seemed larger than the millionth part of a grain of sand, and all worths were as circles or cyphers.

As the day waned towards eventide I went out into the forest. Autumn had come, and it was already far advanced towards the night of the year. The ground was sodden under my feet, and the water trickled down the trunks of the green trees, and only a few skeleton leaves still hung upon the naked tree tops.

But high above me the storm raged and the crown of the forest shivered. It lulled, it rose again, and I heard voices, not feeble, such as of men, but the mighty ones that echo through the spheres.

First came a lament, wild, piercing, as if a

knife had been thrust through the heart of the universe. That was the forest that writhed.

"Why do you complain?" roared the Storm.

"I am weary," answered the Forest, "weary in my very soul, weary with age and suffering. Now I am shedding my leaves, then I shall become white again, and yet I shall not die, for again the sap will rise and the green leaves shoot. If only one could die—die! I am weary, weary of my very soul."

"*You* tired of life, who have scarcely yet begun to live! Shake off your rotten leaves and feel how already the new Spring begins to well up in you. Look at me who saw you birthed and who will see you die, who lived long before Nature even dreamed of you, and who will still live when she will have lost you even as a memory. Look at me: I have borne the weight of all the worlds upon my shoulders, through years for whose endless length there exists no number, and yet I am as straight in the back as when I played and leaped an urchin over the water wastes before the egg of the world had got its shell. Through me it is that

mankind connect their thoughts ;—for I am the swiftest of all messengers. Do you not see the load I bear upon my back and in my hands ?”

“What is it ? I know it not, it looks so strange, and I never hear aught from men.”

“Not for two thousand years have I carried so heavy a burden before ; for the race that lives now has been working at the sorriest smiths’-work known to man : forging the screws for its own coffin.”

And the Storm scattered a handful out over the lands.

“Is that death you are sowing ?” asked the Forest.

“It is fire, it is sulphur,” answered the Storm, “it is poison and two-edged swords. For mankind shall shuffle off the old coils.”

“Relate,” said the Forest.

And the Storm paused awhile, resting like a bird on its wings, and its keen, wise eyes scanned all the countries round.

“Two thousand years ago there lived a man called Jesus. He it was who first said that the weak should possess the earth, and as the

descendants of the slaves became rich and powerful they either burned at the stake or hanged on the gallows all those who refused to believe *their* belief.

"But below the few who sat on thrones and ate off gold—slaves' sons who had become masters—stood new millions of slaves. They thronged outside the portals of the masters' strongholds, one black inconceivable mass, that peoples the earth; and whenever they saw windows gleaming, or heard the clink of gold or men who were joyous, they forgot that the masters too were the sons of slaves, and they stoned his image, which was placed outside the city gates, with the face of a dove and the body of an ascetic. And they raised a cry of vengeance against their own God and against his votaries, their brethren, just because the latter were inside, whilst they themselves were shut out.

"Do you hear the cry? Yesterday I raised it upon my wings, to-day it shrieks with me across the world, for the hour of change is at hand, and the kingdom of the slaves is divided against itself.

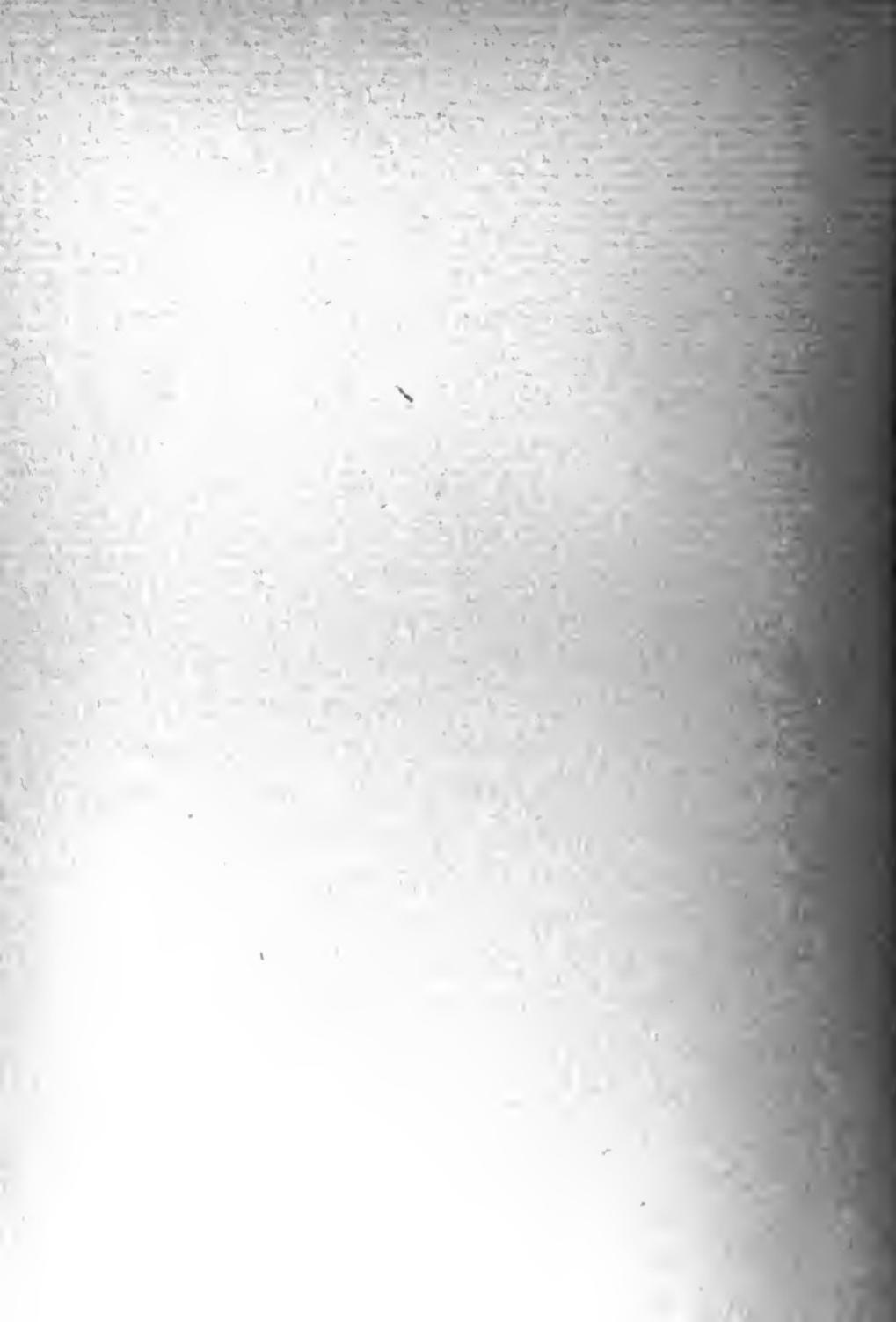
"Do you hear how it batters against the iron portals ; do you hear how the windows crash ; do you hear how the image totters on the ancient altar, worm-eaten wood as it was ? Do you hear those strokes as of a giant wielding an axe ? Do you know what it is ? It is the slaves chopping the tree in whose crown they themselves have built their nest, but that is so great that they do not notice it is their own tree. They imagine it is their enemies', for their God has stricken them with blindness, and all slaves are stupid. To-morrow the world of the slave will burn and they will themselves be the incendiaries. And the night will be scarlet and my breath will be hot and blasting, so that even you will shrivel up as a shaving.

"And when the new day dawns and the sun rises, the kingdoms of the earth will lie in ashes, and the tree of the slaves will be a charred trunk, and the sap will have dried in its veins. But upon the desolate plain two hosts will stand opposed ; the hordes of the one will be reckoned in millions, for the slaves will always be the many, and they will be like unto

a black cloud on the morning sky. Those who stand opposite them will be few, but they will shine with the brightness of dawn. And then there will be a stir in the black cloud, and a man will step forward in the likeness of a slave with a black-avised face, cunning eyes, and low hair-covered forehead ; and then a gleam will appear in the sun-host, and again a man will step forward, but of his beauty no man can say aught, for such an one has not yet been seen upon earth, for it is the *Master*, the only true sovereign, he who was stolen as a child by the demon of the slaves and left to perish miserably, and who, unknowing of his birth-right, grew up in the wilderness where no slave had set his foot ; and then the last great duel will be fought, the duel between the master and the slave, the cloud and the suns. And such a cry of jubilation as I then shall raise has never yet been heard upon earth."

And the Storm rose once more upon its wings and floated away, and the woods stood still and listened, and when I lifted up my eyes the sky behind the naked forest crowns was glittering with stars.

III.



THERE was once upon a time a manikin who wandered through the woods the whole night long, where the glow worms sparkled in the gloom. And when the morning came he stood at the fringe of the wood and watched the sun rise above the ocean.

Then the manikin sat down on the shore and wept. And when he raised his eyes again he saw the great Sea God resting on the surface of the waters. He lay stretched in all his length, with his arms folded, resting his head on his hands. His robe of green silk floated loosely round his body and glistened humidly when the waves lapped ; and his hair streamed far out to the uttermost end of the sea like a broad streak of sunlight ; and his green eyes rested on the manikin, who sat upon the strand and wept.

“ Why do you cry ? ” asked he.

“ I’ve lost my way,” answered the manikin.

" I wandered the whole night through, and I am weary. I want to sleep, but I cannot ; I want to go home, but I hate home ; I am sick of life."

" Well, you have got death," said the Sea God.

" I can't die," answered the manikin, and he shuddered ; " life has been so beautiful, and I am so young."

" Well, then, go to my brother Pan," said the Sea God.

At that the manikin laughed ironically :

" He offered me flowers, but when I went to pluck them they turned into butterflies and flew on their way, and when I caught a butterfly a maggot remained in my hand. Your brother Pan is a rogue."

" Well, then, come to me," said the Sea God.

" What will you give me ? "

" I will give you salt and sunshine, and a great prospect."

" You are so big—you frighten me."

The Sea God lifted a periwinkle in his palm : " And yet I find room in this tiny thing," said he.

"But you look so stern, and your face is so lone-lorn."

Then the Sea God laughed, and his laugh rippled like sun-ray across the sea ; and he lifted his hand, and the depths parted, and the manikin gazed into a crimson coral cave slung with delicate green creepers, and its walls were a mosaic of pearls.

"But I'm bound," he cried, in distress of soul.
"Let me go ! for I love a woman."

Again the Sea God laughed at the manikin.

"Child," said he, "you say my brother Pan is a rogue, and yet you have never found out his greatest piece of roguery."

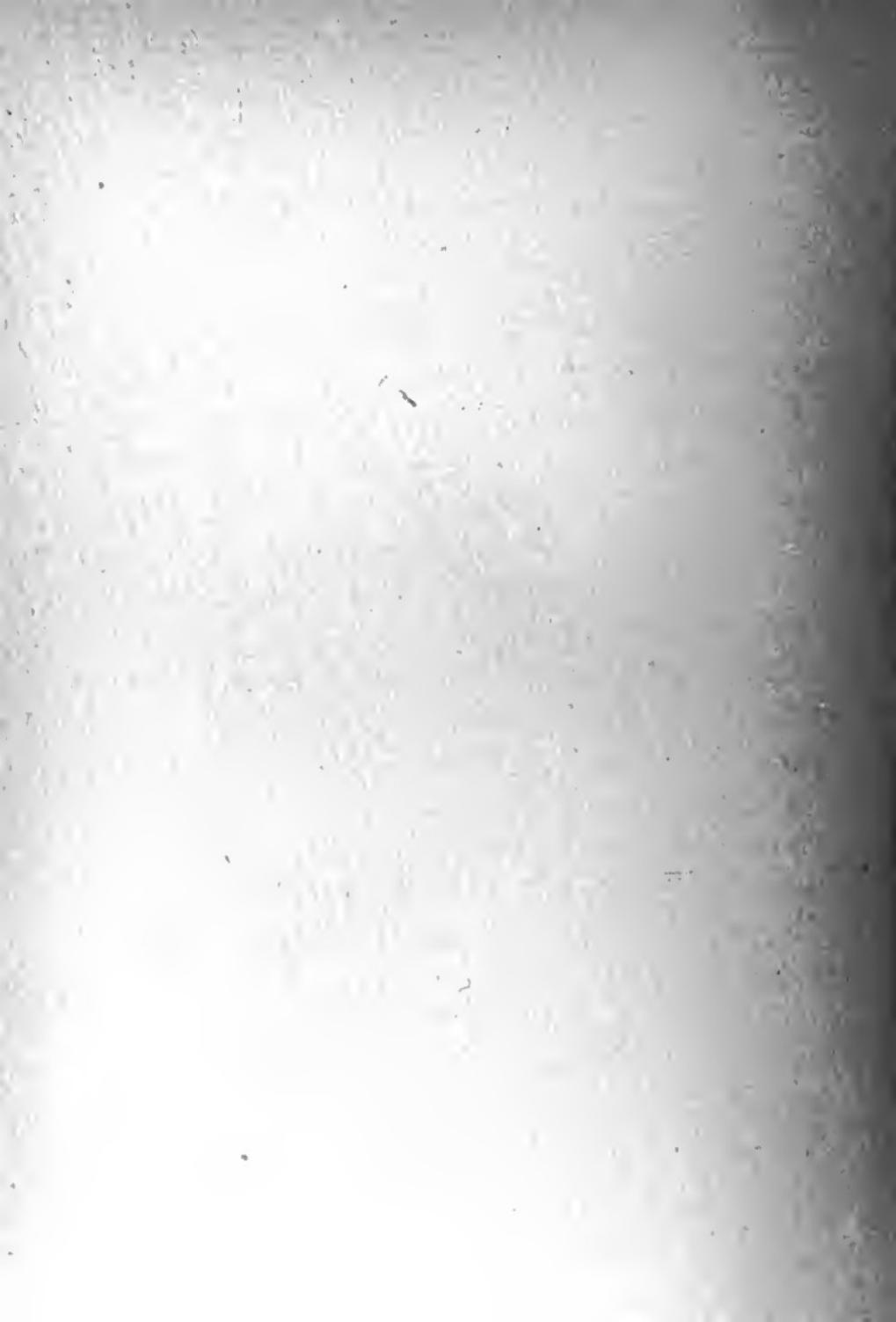
And he dipped his little finger in the ocean, and a whirlpool arose, flinging great drops of spray that resembled green pearls, and foam that shimmered like unto a silver white veil in the sunlight. And under the veil the manikin saw a woman's face, fairer than any he had hitherto seen. And the Sea God breathed upon it, and it vanished as a puff of smoke, dissolved into space.

Then the manikin stood up, and the ground

slipped from under his feet, and slid away and rolled itself together far under the horizon, and he saw himself as a little dark speck on the boundless ocean under the boundless sky, and there was a silence as if all life had died, and the sun shone solitary in the universe.

And the manikin nestled with a feeling of unfathomable security close to the heart of the mighty solitude.

IV.



I WAS twenty years old when I went out into the world to seek happiness. I wandered both long and unceasingly, I wandered both far and near. Yet I found her not. The world lay like an inert mass, life lacked colour, and men concerned me not. There was nothing to which I could attach myself, and I was far from sufficient to myself.

So I consulted books. "Love a woman," said they, "for love alone can reveal to you the hidden meanings of things and the beauty of existence. Love a woman ; and you will hear harps in the air, and feel sunshine in your soul, and happiness will fly into your mouth of its own accord, like the roast sparrows of Schlaraffenland."

Then I set out to seek the woman, and I found her one day at the forest quell. Every morning and every evening for five years I bore her water cruse, and so she became mine. But

when I had owned her for three days and three nights, I saw an earwig in the apple of her eye, and a maggot in the corner of her mouth, and I left her.

Again I consulted books. "Men never find happiness," said they, "unless they find hearth and home, and wife and child." So I fastened a hobble to my leg, and put my head into the social halter; but when I found that the iron still ate into my soul and that they wanted me to grind the seed I desired to sow for a future ingathering into meal for the common larder, I jumped up, turned my house on end, and went out into the King's highway.

And one man pointed a finger at me, and the other called insulting names, and the children pelted me with stones, and the grown-up folk with rotten fruit, and every window was propped full of jeering people. Then I quitted the town and went out into the world, and ascended a high mountain. Behind me, down in the valleys, lay the dwelling-places of men, with all their thousand towns; I had an endless bird's-eye view of them, and they

appeared as a single ant heap, but in front of me the mountains sank perpendicularly into an abyss of the bottom of which I could get no glimpse; and a murmur whispered in the air as when a multitude speaks, thousands of voices and yet only one, and it was a human voice but as if it came from a giant riding on the whirl of the storm:—

“ What is called happiness in the world you have forsaken is nothing more than the petty phantasies of petty minds, a toy for children ; but the great happiness in the face of which you shrink as you shrink now before the mountain cleft, *she* is fearful in her majesty, as is everything great. If you dare not the leap, turn back, for then you are fit for the small happiness of the world ; but if you desire to attain the greater, hurl yourself headlong into the depths. But bear in mind : your fate is concealed from you, no one knows what the black gulf hides except those who have seen it with their own eyes, and there is no return journey for those once down. Dare—win—with shut eyes—with set teeth——”

I am going to the new world that he alone
sees who has quitted the abodes of men, and
from which there is no return road. And my
thoughts circle round my head like birds, and
the most delicate moods of my soul take butter-
fly form, and my dreams wax like green leaves
and many-coloured flowers on the strand of
a sea in which they are mirrored, and the very
seas are my own soul, and the blue sky is
arched above my head by the most ethereal
of my fancies.

V.

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WHEN wine began to lose its flavour, and Eve lost her one front tooth, I was seized with the desire to solve the enigma of life. I spent five years dissecting a fly's leg, for I had heard that one must seek the great in the infinitesimal, and that the manifold scheme of creation lay in one blade of grass ; but when at the end of five years I took a rest and lifted my eyes to the heavens, I discovered I was sitting in a hole deep down in the ground, and that I had lost sight of the whole world, and that it was only with difficulty that I could catch a glimpse of a strip of blue sky by straining back my head. So I left the fly's leg alone and climbed out of the hole. But I was almost dazed by the light of day, and I sat in the midst of the sunshine and richly coloured nature blind as an owl.

In the seventh year I met an old wise man who told me that what I had supposed to be

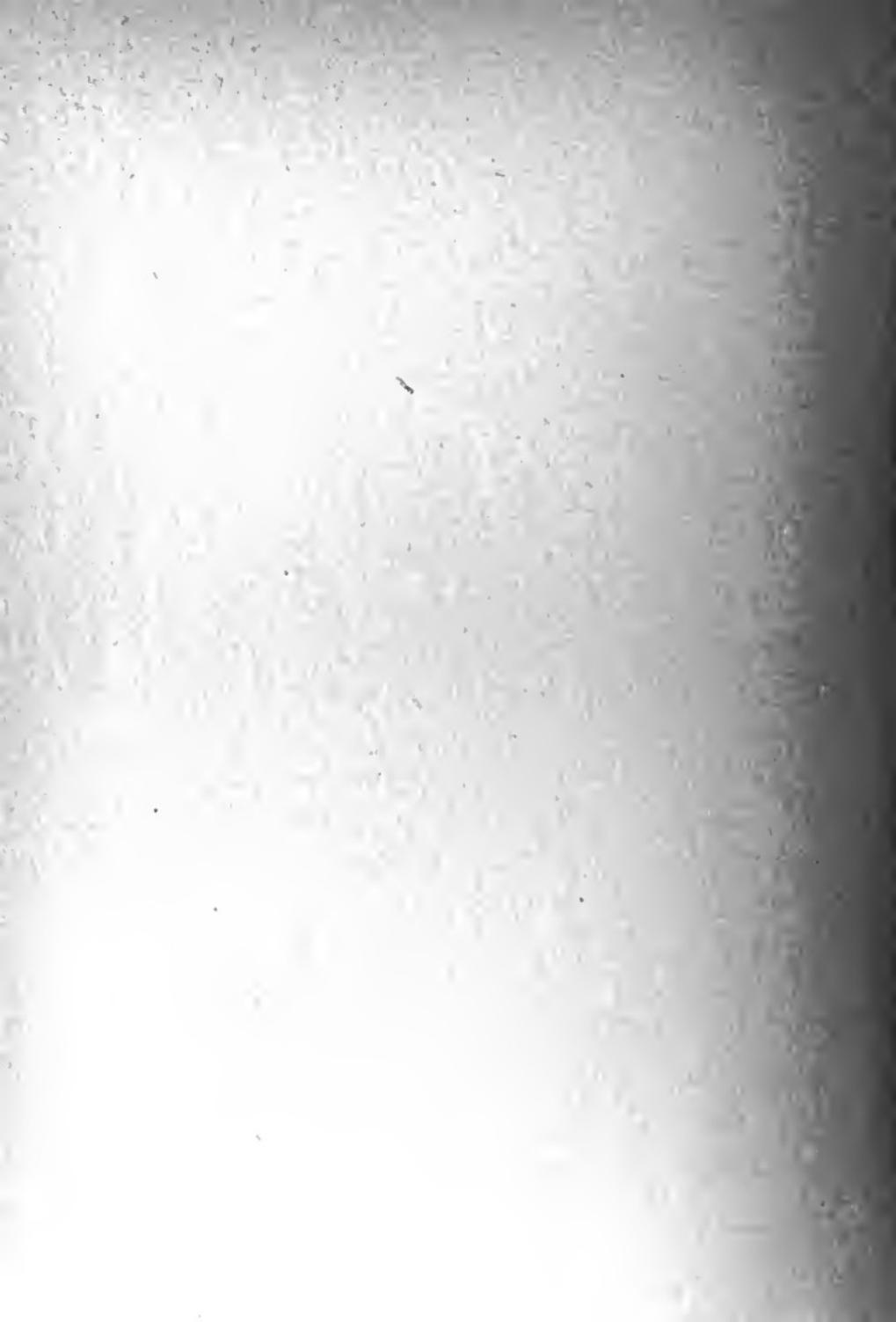
the tree of knowledge only bore unripe fruit. Then the old wise man taught me that absolutely no materials were needed to build up one's house other than the mathematical lines of pure reason. So I hammered away right merrily, and it went apace like a noiseless dance. But one day a tiny zephyr wafted by, and the whole concern fluttered away, and I watched it floating in the air like a rift of gossamer.

Then I shook the old wise man by his old white beard and bade him go and order himself a coffin, if it be that he could not fashion one for himself out of his mathematical dots and lines. And I closed my eyes and lay musing in an agony of soul. Night came, and suddenly I felt the pain snap as the husk about a seed, and I felt something grow in me, something that was sinking its roots into my very heart, rising as sap through my veins; and leaves, uncurled out of their sheaths, and they had colour and form but not of this world, and when morning came I saw in my soul's dawning a blossom, the great half-

opened blossom of a strange flower. And of this flower there is only one stock, and it is *my* blood that waters its roots, and the plant grows *inside*, invisible to all but me. But I know that when the blossom opens I shall find at its core the great Unknown.



VI.



THE old I lay in bed between white sheets at the point of death ; the new I sat a piece away, and his features were lost in the gloom.

“ Help me ! ” whimpered the old I.

“ Do you ask help from your foe ? ” answered the new I.

“ Help me ! ”

“ No, you must die.”

And the delirium of death seized the sick man, and he shrieked that great black rats were springing over the white sheets, over his hands and over his face.

“ They are your old thoughts coming again,” the voice made answer out of the gloom ; “ they are filth thrown off by your brain.”

“ Have you then no mercy ? ”

“ No, not for you. You are a coward to sue me for mercy. Did you shew me any mercy ? When I was new born did you treat me as a father ; when the milk seethed in my mother’s pails did you give me to drink ; when I lay on the stone floors and shivered, did you put me to bed ? ”

" Silence ! Oh silence ! mercy ! "

" When I grew to manhood, do you remember how you tried to assassinate me, do you remember how you drove me from your house ; do you remember how you tried to gash me in the foot, put out my eyes, so that I might be halt and blind ? "

Then the dying man writhed like a worm that has been trodden upon, and blood-flecked foam stained his lips.

" Do you remember how you got all your friends and acquaintances to conspire against me, to mock me, wound me, and embitter my life ? You hid food from me, and gave me sorry fare, you and yours, and you spattered the vileness of your own souls over those who were dear to me ? —

" Now you shall die."

And the sick man shrieked as when death bends over the bed, and he called out that the rats were crawling into his mouth and sitting in his brain, and he rolled himself into a ball, arms and legs and sheets like a mass of tangled white maggots, and gave up the ghost.

VII.



I STOOD and gazed upon the world and marvelled at its beauty; as it lay stretched before me it was like unto a precious gold ornament upon a cushion of azure velvet.

Suddenly a shadow dropped over everything. Methought, for I knew the noon drew near, that it was but a cloud crossing the sun; but on looking about me, I discovered that it was the century darkening to its close, and all round me silence gathered as before a storm, and I heard voices muttering, voices that never reached me through the tumult of the day.

First a voice came from afar, ay, as if from the uttermost end of the world behind the horizon.

“Why are men so troubled?”

It answered from the East, it answered from the West, it murmured in the South, and it thundered in the North :—

"They are children afraid of the night when the storm draws near."

And again a voice sounded, but this time a solitary voice behind me, and so near that I turned round.

"Why have we forgotten to rejoice?"

I was about to reply myself, but it was answered from the East, it was answered from the West, it murmured in the South, and it thundered in the North :—

"Men have no time to rejoice!"

But when the noise had died away, I heard a mournful voice repeat the question very softly in my right ear :—

"Tell me, you, why can men never more rejoice?"

And my soul swelled with trouble and was filled with tears.

"For this reason," said I, "we shrink when the great happiness falls to our share, and we never can meet it face to face without feeling the talons of the bird of terror clutching at our soul."

VIII.



ONE evening in late autumn I steered out into the fjord. My sails were snow white, but the sunset stained them with a hectic tinge, so that they looked as if they had been dipped in wine, so I sailed out alone to sea when all the others were going to bed in their homes.

Then I saw an enormous black hand stretch down over the fjord. It set an ugly black mark on my sail, and then it drew back again. And a voice pierced the lovely stillness of the autumn evening, sharp as a knife thrust, rough as a drunkard's bass :—

"He has a stain on his sail ! He has a stain on his sail ! Come hither, good folk, and see ! He is not ashamed to shew his dirty tackle !"

And when I turned about the strand was densely packed with people. They pointed, they jeered, they threatened. And above my head the black stain darkened my sail as a cloud in the time of roses. Then I felt my

conscience prick me, for although I knew my hands were clean, still the stain was there on *my* sail, and it cast a shadow over my soul as if it were a real crime, and the unknown voices seemed to me to be so convincing, and I was so alone upon the water, and the people on the shore were so many. The wind lulled, and the sails hung slack like withered leaves after the passage of a venomous wind, too, as if they shared my mood, and I was about to scuttle my boat and sink.

Then came the miracle that saved me. High above the people on the strand hung a hand, enormous as the one that had set the mark upon my sail, but white, white, and it held a light, and the reflection of it fell like a sudden white dawn over the countless black multitude.

And I saw by its light men's forms with wasps' stings, men's forms with foxes' tails, men's forms with hounds' heads, bloodhounds' heads, with red maws and lolling tongues. . . . And the wind freshened, and I steered right merrily out to sea with the black mark in the centre of my sail, as the sun rose up over the waters.

IX.



UPON a great plain outside a city the whole youth of the country were assembled. In the midst of them stood a giant: his foot was as long as a street, and his flat hand as broad as a market-place; and he was so tall that he could not stand erect under the sky, but was forced to bend his head. And when he spoke his voice was so strong that the youth of the country trembled like aspen leaves at a wind puff.

“Jump Jim Crow!” he called, and the youth of the country immediately jumped Jim Crow.

“Couche là!” he yelled, and all the youth of the country crouched like dogs at his feet.

“Hie over!” he commanded, and held out his riding-switch, and the entire youth of the country jumped over the riding-switch with well-trained agility.

“Novelties! Novelties! Who'll buy?” he wheedled, and all the youth of the country

bought his novelties, money down—honestly—cheated in their change.

Then the giant took every lilliput and Tommeliden of them on his flat hand, not singly, but in heaps, and he scattered them handful by handful into space. And when the plain was emptied, seventy times a thousand black specks were crawling about the pulpits and cathedras. At first I took them to be rats, but on closer observation I discovered that they were human beings, and since that, that they were the youth of the country.

X.



I SAT on the sea-shore one forenoon in mid-summer. The sea lay quietly gleaming in the sun before me, and a great number of people were bathing. The naked white bodies, the blue water, the golden quivering air, made me fancy I was gazing at a piece of southern Hellenic life.

Tiny waves lapped up over the pebbles on the shore, slid back and came again—so small, so gentle, as to hardly merit the name of waves. They were the youngest children of the ocean, and they babbled to themselves as children do, and it was clear to me that all their prattle was just something they had heard of late from father and mother, and they were repeating it now to themselves, without knowing the meaning of the words.

“Ay, the sea is the greatest source of health, the one that keeps the universe sound. I have

salt enough for all the corpses of life, and in me
men lave themselves clean."

There is *one* thing that men need—to keep their bodies clean. In this lies Salvation and the future—to cherish their bodies as a precious vessel. Rather slay one's enemy than forget to shift one's shirt—so runs the first commandment in the new moral law,—*that* some day, when the journeymen have learnt to keep silent in the assemblies, the new Master will incise on a gold tablet before all the people. And in measure as he shifts his shirt and scours his body white, so will he loathe that belief or thought that he has borne through the week, and his soul will always walk in shining white linen.

XI.



I MEET them—the eyes—wherever I go or stay, in everything and in everyone.

In the populous town and out in the wide deserts, at the cradle of the new born and the coffin that is lowered into the earth, there where the happy laugh and the miserable weep—I meet them—the eyes—everywhen and everywhere.

In the woman I desired to love and in my best friend, in the executioner and the victim, in the high and the low, under silk hat and moleskin cap—I meet them—the eyes—ever the same.

They surround me day and night; in the morning when I wake they stand around my bed, and at night when I close my eyes they gleam out of the darkness. And they are never just two as in a man's face, but they surge forward in myriads as if from a bottomless casket, as if they belonged to a fantastic

giant polypus that grips the whole world in his arms. They follow me like fate, they fasten into my soul as teeth in meat. I am obliged to see them no matter where I turn, I am conscious of them, strive how I may to tear them out, I breathe them in the air, inhale them in the sunshine, I devour them in the words of men and in the thoughts of books. . . .

With an expression half such as one sees in an ill-treated hound, half as in an enemy lying in wait,—as a knife unsheathed under a cloak, sneaking up behind one's back—as thoughts that have never been put into words, as words that have never got beyond a hoarse whisper — anguished and cunning, deceitful, threatening, and filled with hate—they stare into mine the eyes, eyes of the sick, the weak, the crippled ; serfs'-eyes catching just a gleam of the azure mantle of the Master on the golden horizons of the future.

XII.



I DO not dwell behind locked doors and closed blinds; every passer - by can look through my windows — ye who have suspicion that I sit up to my neck in filth and that blowflies buzz in swarms around my head—come and see !

I shall stand on my threshold and receive ye, shall accompany ye through all my rooms, shall open all cupboards, and let ye peer into all drawers. But first ye must change your shoes and scour your hands, for no scouring has any much effect upon your kind of dirt, and I am not going to have the marks of your fingers upon my things.

Ye will find here well - polished vessels, furniture without a grain of dust, the perfume of many flowers, and rooms filled with sunshine ; but ye will hear no blowflies buzz save those that always swarm in your own brains.

Mayhap ye will point to a few flies that lie dead in the window frame, but we all sail with corpses in our freight, and flies are not the worst of corpses.

“Come to me! I fear ye not. It is ye who are the cowards, I know ye so well. I shall follow ye out into the desert, and ye shall carry naked knives in your girdles, and I alone shall only have my bare hands. I know ye; ye are like the snapping curs that dare to bite my heels but slink away like cowards with their tails between their legs if one fix one's eyes upon them. So much ye will dare do—stick a knife in me if I inadvertently turn my back on ye; but if I look into your eyes ye slink away with hanging head. I know ye,—ye are cowards.”

XIII.



I WAS devouring my black bread, dipping it in water to soften it. My enemies sat at a sumptuous table and ate larks' tongues and drank exquisite wines.

"You must not imagine," said one of them, "that we do not know how to render you the honour that is due to you. We do you full justice in our thoughts. We respect your courage and your firmness. You have never made compromises, you have always jumped into the breach, you have never shirked anything in the defence of your convictions, and above all, you have been true to yourself, tested, investigated, weighed and valued, steadfastly, repeatedly. It is great, we acknowledge it, we cannot do otherwise than esteem you for this, although we are still of the opinion that you are your own worst enemy, and stand in your own light."

Then I answered, "Good food gives a sound

skin and a merry spirit. You see the world through the glow of wine and the sound of the dinner gong, and even your enemies appear to you in this light. You fling your pity at me and imagine you are doing a good action, for your wretched drowsy soul never realises that it is to me as a crumb from the rich man's table. And even though your face is puffed and flushed with too much eating, yet I can see the brand of the slave burning on your brow when you speak to me thus. Can you not see yourself how poor and naked your soul reveals itself in your words? It lies steaming in your hand, and the smoke smells evilly as it blows up towards me. Cock your ears and open your mouth and stare with all your might, so that wisdom may find a way into your soul through every opening. You praise me because I never have been a weathercock that turned with the wind of the day. You praise me because I have always taken a bird's-eye view of the world, so that the petty every-day interests of life looked so small that they escaped my gaze. You praise

me because I prefer to eat this frugal, sorry fare, rather than lie in a common way and kiss hands to vulgarity. All this you praise,—why? Because you imagine I had the option of a choice, because you yourself happened to have one; because you cannot conceive that all this is the natural outcome of my temperament and its necessary expression. All your life through you have weighed in a scale, huckster like, every one of your actions. You have no other instincts than those of a huckster, you see in all others merely your own huckster likeness, you measure with a true huckster standard, and judge with a huckster heart.

“Why do you pity me?—because to you I am a huckster with whom business has been bad. Why do you praise me?—because to you I am a huckster who always has used standard weights.”



XIV.



I SAT in a room surrounded by all my friends. My blood coursed hotly through my veins, my heart was filled with restlessness, and I found a difficulty in breathing. I jumped up and paced up and down the floor.

"What is the matter with you?" cried my friends.

"It is so gloomy in here, and the air seems close."

At this my friends started, and they all sat dumbly and gazed at me with staring eyes.

"That is just an idea you have got into your head," said he who had bartered his own eyes for an office desk, "or why should we others not have noticed it?"

"Don't you see how the sun shines; let us open all the windows and the door."

"It is bound to give us the snuffles," said the joker of the party, and he crept into the corner near the fire, where he soon began to snore.

"Our room is just as good as any other," spouted he who was always obliged to spout since he lost his natural voice one day in a slough.

"Will it benefit us, or will it do you any good?" hissed he who sold his conviction for threepenny bits with the idea that they were gold coins, and who felt a sore prick of conscience whenever he caught sight of an original opinion.

"Pull down the blinds and then you won't see the sun," whispered he who never ventured to speak aloud since the day he got a kick from his master because he had said that his dog had long ears.

"You only need to quit our close and stuffy room, and us, and the whole show, and betake yourself to the wilderness," jeered he who shuffled about on a club-foot as if he had a ball attached to his leg.

"You have said the word," I cried, and my face lit the room as with sunshine.

Then all my friends sprang up from their seats, and the one-eyed one glared with his

one eye, and he who snored gaped wide awake and looked stupid, and the spouter elevated his hand pathetically, and the lips of the jaundiced member trembled as if the words he wished to utter were so distended with bile that they could not find a way out, and the whisperer looked as if he were praying, and the club-footed one got cramps.

I rushed to the door, and they all screamed with one accord: "Bear in mind, if you have once closed the door behind you, you will never get in again!"

I halted at the threshold, turned round and looked at my friends, and I failed to recognise them, it was as if I had never seen them before. They were dogs from whom I had snatched a bone, cardsharpers whose false play I had exposed, wild animals cheated of their prey, slaves that I had whipped, but they were not those whom I had formerly dubbed my friends. And the room—a wild beast's lair, a madhouse, a viper's nest, a goat pen, anything, what you please, only not my old room.

And I wrenched open the door and slammed

it to in haste, and the windows were filled with faces ; but as for me, I wandered forth glad in my loneliness, through the May breeze kissing the May flowers.

XV.



I HAD been wandering from the early morning. It drew already towards eventide. The district about was deserted, and I could see no sign of human abode. Night came dark and starless. I stopped on seeing that the high road was cleft into two branches, and I stood irresolute which I should choose, when a gleam of light flashed close beside me. By its shine I could see an old man sitting on the trunk of a hewn tree; his beard was so long as if it had grown for centuries, and his hair was so white as if whitened by the snows of glacial times.

"Can you tell me, old man," I queried, "which of these two roads I must take in order to find shelter for the night?"

The old fellow looked up, and his eyes seemed to me to shine out from an immeasurable depth and from as great a distance as the evening stars. He scrutinised me closely.

"Go to the right, young man. Do you see the light over there, the great light that looks so great because it is so near? Follow the road in the direction of that light, and before midnight you will reach an inn where you will find a warm bed waiting for you, a good supper, and a merry company."

"But tell me too," said I, "you wonderful old man, who look so wise, whither leads the road to the left, and what is the little light that blinks quite feebly in the distance?"

"It only looks so little because it is so endlessly far away," answered the old man, "otherwise it is the greatest and the clearest light that ever shone on the world. But let it not lure you, because to it you will never reach. Once upon a time I too stood at these dividing paths, just as you, young man, irresolute whither I should go. That is a long time ago; I was going as you are, and it was an evening such as this, only the gloom was a thousandfold deeper. I lit my light and went to the left. And the hours grew to years and the years to centuries, but the night lay thickly about

me, and the light gleamed ahead of me always just as tiny. Then I wearied and turned back, and now I sit here once more and know not whither I shall go. Go to the right, young man, thither where the great light shines, which seems so great because it is so near. Ye will find a warm bed, a good supper, and a merry company."

"But you yourself, old man, do not you yearn for warmth and a roof over your head, now that night is here and the coolness falls?"

Then the old man lifted his lantern, and the rays fell directly upon his face, and its expression was as sphinx-like as a starry winter night. And he stood up and he waxed before me till he towered like a mountain with eternal snow on its crest; and as for me I felt myself less than the tiniest insect in the fields.

"For me there is no night, neither is there day, and I find no place in men's dwellings, and even if I were to find it, men would not let me in, for they know me not."



XVI.



THE air was filled with clay-coloured mist, the rain fell in torrents, and the thunder came rolling and booming over the town. Darkness closed over the earth ; I lit my lamp and fastened the shutters before my windows.

As the watchman in the cathedral tower was calling midnight, a shriek was heard as if coming from the bowels of the world, and right through the yellow lamp gloom a shining blue-white sword cleft its way. I looked up : a strange man was sitting right in front of me, at the opposite side of the table. His hair had a blue-white gleam, like lightning when the storm is nearly ended ; it tumbled in serpentine and zigzag lines over his arched brow ; his mouth laughed like a child's, but his eyes looked askance like a lunatic's.

"I am the wandering Jew, also called by men Ahasuerus ; I am the bird Phoenix that is burnt at the pyre every hundred years, but that riseth again out of his own ashes."

Time passed—a second or an hour.

“I am the memory of mankind, that once in the life of every generation flasheth up in its brain as lightning in the night illumines a world that is the world of the day and yet different. I am the great wizard that conjures forth the *fata morgana* of the future for humanity. I stand with one foot in the greyness of the past, and with the other in the gloom of the to be. I am the tree of knowledge of good and evil that the Lord planted in Eden.”

Again time passed—a second or an hour.

“I am he who breaks through the circle into which the spirits of the time form themselves in order to stay or run their course again. I am the eld and the child, I am the conscience of primeval man, whose blood flows out of the universal heart; but I too am the seeing prophet.”

And again time passed—a second or an hour.

“Living, I am called mad; dead, I am called genius.” With that the cock crew. The stranger had flown, and the grey morning peered through the chinks in the shutter.

XVII.



I HAD left the shallow firths and narrow straits behind me, for I had wearied of pastorals with smoke curling from rustic cabins. I had gazed my fill at the sun that shone in stolid stupidity over the just and unjust alike.

After I had spent all my youth in sailing over many seas in my dainty pleasure-boat, I was met one morning as I came on deck by the glorious spectacle upon which my fancy had dwelt for many years through murky days and bright nights. From horizon to horizon and right across the arch of the sky a portal stretched in the form of a crescent moon, and on this giant bow sparkled in golden letters these words :—

This is the entrance to the Kingdom of Truth.

And as the twilight dropped over the sea, my boat glided in through the portal to the strains of a music that is never heard in the world of the everyday.—

I had tarried in the new land for fifteen months. One day I lay on the deck of my boat gazing into space, and my soul was filled with restful joy. The sky was red, red as roses and wine, red as love and blood, and the ocean was red as the sky. And the swart sun hung in the red sky, sable as coal or the memory of sorrow, and it was mirrored in the sorghum depths of the ocean like a colossal column the colour of a pomegranate when it inclines to black. Far away on the horizon a tawny streak glistened like a golden fringe on the crimson canopy. They were my newly discovered islets, over which I roamed a new Adam in paradise, a new being in a new world. For that which was crooked in the old world was straight here, and those things which I had been used to see running in zigzags ran here in circles. Here former virtues hobbled on crutches; as senile oldings at the point of death, whilst sins stood in full flower; and the fruits that grew on these unknown trees provided me with a fare of rare sweetness, for they were of the same

species as those into which Mother Eve bit ; whereas in those which I had brought with me from the old world, as its most splendid ingathering, I invariably found—worms in the kernel.

I lay stretched on the deck of my pleasure-boat, and my eyes rested upon the tawny fringe on the red canopy, and I was restfully glad in spirit, and beautiful fancies detached themselves softly from the loose white network of my thoughts, letting it slide from them ; and rising, bent and mirrored themselves in my soul. And their faces were full of peace, and their eyes were laughter-lit, and their lips moved —suddenly I heard my own voice say :—

“ Happy, happy, happy is he who has found the one great truth, and can rest in its meadows. Then to him—what are foes ?—what is death ? Thistledown and gossamer. Life is his own soul, and his soul is a guest-chamber in which he holds quiet festivals. Threefold happy he who can rest in its meadows and listen to the purling of the streams of eternal truth.” Suddenly it whistled through the air, and the screams of birds sounded ; and as I lifted my

eyes I saw the ruby space filled with birds swart as the sun, with the long pointed wings of sea birds, the wings that carry them on distant journeys. And when they were poised right above my boat, the one that flew first swooped down and perched upon the mast-head, and speaking with a human voice, said : " He who casts anchor is soon out of the running. Yesterday the promised land flowing with milk and honey, to-day the desert in which no flower blows. To-morrow your Eldorado is a fossil-land. Now we rustle away over your head whilst you lie and dream in your arrogant well-being, forgetting that you too swept by forgotten countries whilst men slept. Behind your islets new worlds lie and new auroras blaze."

And the sable bird rose upon his broad-pointed wings, those that carry on distant journeys, and swept away towards the horizon, and vanished behind the golden fringe, woven by islets round the sea's red canopy. And the swart sun flamed, and I set all my sails, and my dainty craft sped away with the wind that came rushing in the wake of the fleeting birds, even as a bird, a sea bird, a storm bird.

XVIII.



WHEN on the day after my first mountain climb I stepped out of my house and went down the street, I became aware of a man standing at the street corner staring at me with two gleaming cat's eyes. I went on my way, but I felt he was sneaking after me. When I turned round he looked aside, when I halted he stood and gazed at the wares in a shop window. I entered a house: when I came out I was met by two gleaming cat's eyes from the street corner.

Since that time he has followed me, persecuted me, day out day in, year after year.

When I enter an hotel he slinks after me and sits down with his friends at the nearest table. I can hear him cackle with his peculiar laugh that resembles a night-jar's note, and I have a presentiment that he is talking about me. If it should happen that I hurt my foot and strike the sore place on one of the cobble

stones in the street, so that I wince and my face works with the pain, he comes to meet me with an elated self-satisfied air, and doffs his hat to his knees as he greets me, accentuating his politeness so that I may notice the insult concealed under it ; but if I should happen to have a handful of aces and trumps he slinks down a bye-lane as soon as he sees me, even from a great distance, for in that case he has no desire to meet me. I only get a glimpse of his crooked back, that reminds me of a whipped cur's, and a furtive spiteful look out of his gleaming cat's eyes.

But, yesterday, as I saw him from afar turn suddenly into a side alley, I hastily took a cross-cut and met him ; planted myself right in front of him, and looked him in the face. He laughed in the way men laugh in desperate confusion, and his cat's eyes dropped as a weapon dashed out of an opponent's hand.

" Why do enclose your dirty guts in glass ? " asked I.

At that he jumped as if I had stuck a knife through him, and shot a furtive look at me so

full of spite, so stark with gall that I felt as if the uncleanness of it spurted over my face; and he blushed suddenly with an unspeakable shame, as if I had taken him in adultery.

Then I cried gleefully: "Now I have you! you are one of those who trade upon the coward's shame over himself, and his spite against sins that really exist in his own evil conscience."



XIX.



ONE forenoon, when out upon the ocean which stretches its boundless surface between the old and the new world, I saw from the deck of my yacht a black speck away on the otherwise bare and void horizon. At first I thought that the object was a ship, but in measure as it approached it proved to be an animal of unknown appearance, but resembling an ox, that was bobbing like an eider duck on the water. It bellowed at me when still at a great distance.

"Who are *you*, vermin?"

"Vermin yourself," I replied. "I am Young Ofeg,—but who are you?" I added, as the monster came abreast of my craft.

"I am the great *Bos Humanitatis*, round whom the peoples dance. On your knees!"

"But it is by no means a way of mine to adore strange gods. Bare the marrow of your being and the reins of your soul, so that I may see of what stuff you are made."

With that a parchment scroll, such as one sees in the paintings of the Middle Ages, curled out of the beast's mouth, and the following words were inscribed on it: "The good of All is the Highest Weal," and the colossus bellowed—"This is the great truth, the only truth that was for ever found in the world or ever will be found. On your knees! This truth is adored by all people, and all tongues chant its praises. Everything must fall on its face in the dust before it. On your knees! All things shall be reduced to the same level, the level of mediocrity. What is under shall be lifted up, what is over shall be dragged down. On your knees! I say."

"I don't believe you. I believe in the one. I believe in myself. The God to whom I could bring myself to kneel dwells in my own soul, where I have prepared him a chamber. I treat him with my best wine. I deck his dwelling with the rarest plants, and it is the joy of my life to see him hourly wax in strength. Some day, when he is full-fledged, he will soar out into the azure spheres high above the swamps in which your reptiles wallow.

It is he whom you would slay. For in the same moment that I would bend my knee to adore you, you monster, my proud God would give up the ghost."

The monster snorted at that, so that the water rose in waves and frothed with stinking spume.

"On your knees! or I will trample you and your offspring into pulp under my claws, make you each and all into the most wretched stuff in existence."

"But suppose I were the stronger," laughed I.
"You vermin!"

"Don't you know how the tiny parasite manages with the butterfly larvae? I will stick in your skin like a gadfly, and you shall plunge across the ocean in helpless fury under my stings, like your brother in the great feeding grounds. Will you try it on?"

The monster got under way, and the water waltzed about him, rising like a cloud of foam; and my bark glided softly ahead over the ocean that basked quietly in the noonday sun, and the new shore loomed ahead of her bow.



XX.



THE day had come when the great battle was to take place on the plain before the city ; both hostile hosts were marshalled. On the heights in the North stood the blackcoats and the star-decorated, down below these the smock-frocks, in countless numbers, that vanished from the gaze as they melted into one against the horizon. The signal for the attack had already sounded in the camps of the smock-frocks as I strolled through the city gates. The road ran right through the hosts, and there was no other road for me to take save this one. I had hardly advanced a hundred paces when I heard a rumbling as if a storm was coming. It was the men in blouses who cried—

“ There is a blackcoat ; seize him ! ”

And again before the echo had died away I heard a rumbling, but this time it was like unto the chord of an organ in church. This time it was the blackcoats, the star-decked, who cried.

"There is a smock-frock ; seize him !"

Thereupon I lifted my hand to order silence, and I said, "I am not a blackcoat, for I hate the gloom and love the noonday sun. I am not a smock-frock, for my pride is gladsome, and my defiance sportive ; and I would rather be a butterfly than an ant.

"Never will I fight on your side, you smock-frocks, for were you to gain the victory everything I hold dear would be laid in pasture under the kine's feet.

"Neither will I follow your lead, blackcoats, for you are all tarred with the same brush. Why do you quarrel ? Go rather into the church that is tolling for matins in the town, and open the place in your psalm-books and sing in harmony the old verses. How vast be their advantages, how great their pleasures prove, who live like brethren and consent in offices of love."

With that I continued my journey and went out into the wilderness. When I had gone some way I heard the first shot. Then I was elated in soul, for I told myself that now the great Beelzebub whimpers.

XXI.



THE battle was ended and the object attained. I had served my five years for Rachel, and the twelve tasks were fulfilled. I looked at everything I had done and found it good. So then I consecrated the seventh day to be a day of rest. Rachel sat at my feet, and my kingdom lay around me, basking quietly in the mid-day sun.

The three wise men from the East entered and laid at my feet gold, frankincense, and myrrh; the second presented me with elephants' tusks, the third with Polar bear skins; whilst Arabian houris danced in my halls.

But outside my doors I perceived a long line of men clad in fair white silken garments, and their faces were hushed in silence. And under his left arm each man of them bore a silver casket. And each man was so like unto the next as one white hair resembleth the other, and the caskets seemed to me to be one and the same casket, reduplicated as through the facets of a crystal.

"Who are ye?" I inquired of the nearest of the white-clad men, he who stood in the doorway.

"We are the coming days, right to the end of your life, that stand waiting to be admitted one after the other into your halls," he replied, bending himself almost to the ground, whereupon all those that stood behind him, even as far as the horizon, bent in the same manner, as if someone had pulled an invisible thread that ran through all of them.

"And what do you hide in your caskets?" I queried again.

"That is the score of the hymn that your serving spirits play every morning in your honour," added the white-clad man, and again he bowed to the earth, and again all the other white men followed his example. With that I was seized with a fit of yawning so tremendous and so long that the white men trembled as mists before the blast, and the walls of my chamber flickered as the wings in a theatre. And I jumped up off my throne, seized my staff and my field-glass and my wallet, and—woke out of my dream.

XXII.



ONE summer night as the full moon rose, I wandered into the forest. In an open glade between the alders I found the God of the time napping in the moonshine.

"What are you seeking in the wood at this late hour?" asked he; "you look so thoughtful, and your eyes are full of fear."

"I seek help for humanity," I replied; "the races are listless, deedless, faint-hearted. If they are unconcerned, it is from apathy. If they are fearless, it is fatalism. If they are strong, it is resignation. I seek for the witchwort, whose sap alone can give to mankind lust of existence, joy in the simple fact of living, make their feet light and their spirit bright, create great dreams and incite to deeds of derring-do. I seek the backbone of humanity that is lost to it."

The God lay silent, and gazed out into the endless space that sparkled in mystery ahead

of him. It seemed to me that he was laughing, but suddenly I saw him knit his brows into a frown. And from afar a growling rose through the wood, and darkness fell upon us, and the growling rolled nearer and the darkness grew thicker, and in the gloom there was a fantastic shadow-play of indistinct forms with red gleaming eyes. All at once the growling turned into the baying of hounds, and I saw many hundred couples rushing towards me. Instinctively I stood on guard and gripped the knife in my belt.

Then I heard someone chuckle softly, quite close to me, chuckle heartily and quietly. And the bay of the hounds hushed, and the gloom lightened, and the wood about me stood silently in the moonlit summer night, and in the open glade amongst the alders lay the Time God chuckling.

"When the time comes," he said, "when mankind comes seeking for the magic wort, like you, then I will conjure forth the great terror. *Then* the races will draw their knives from their belts and stiffen their backs—just as you did a while ago, and find again its lost backbone."

XXIII.



IN a valley encircled by hills dwelt men. The sun shone, and it was summer. And as evening drew near, and I began to ascend the mountain side, some were holding hands and dancing in rings, others were drinking coffee on the green grass, and others teaching the children their ABC.

The next day I had accomplished the first spiral of my mountain ascent, and I stood on a projecting crag, from which I had a view over the valley below me. Nothing seemed to have changed from the yesterday: men danced, drank coffee, and taught the children their ABC, just as when I had quitted them. I called to them to follow me in my journey up towards a higher point of view, but no one answered, no one seemed to have heard my voice.

On the next day, towards eventide, I had again ascended the mountain in a new spiral,

and stood upon a jutting crag right above the one from which I had gazed on the valley the day before. The depths below me presented exactly the same spectacle, with this sole difference, that all objects seemed smaller. But when the people caught sight of me it was evident that they grew annoyed: one laughed mockingly, the second shrieked in scoffing terms, and the third flung stones. Then I continued my journey, and my soul was filled with pity; I mentally added many commentaries to the text—to understand all is to forgive all—and I set the new religion of human suffering into rhyme and verse.

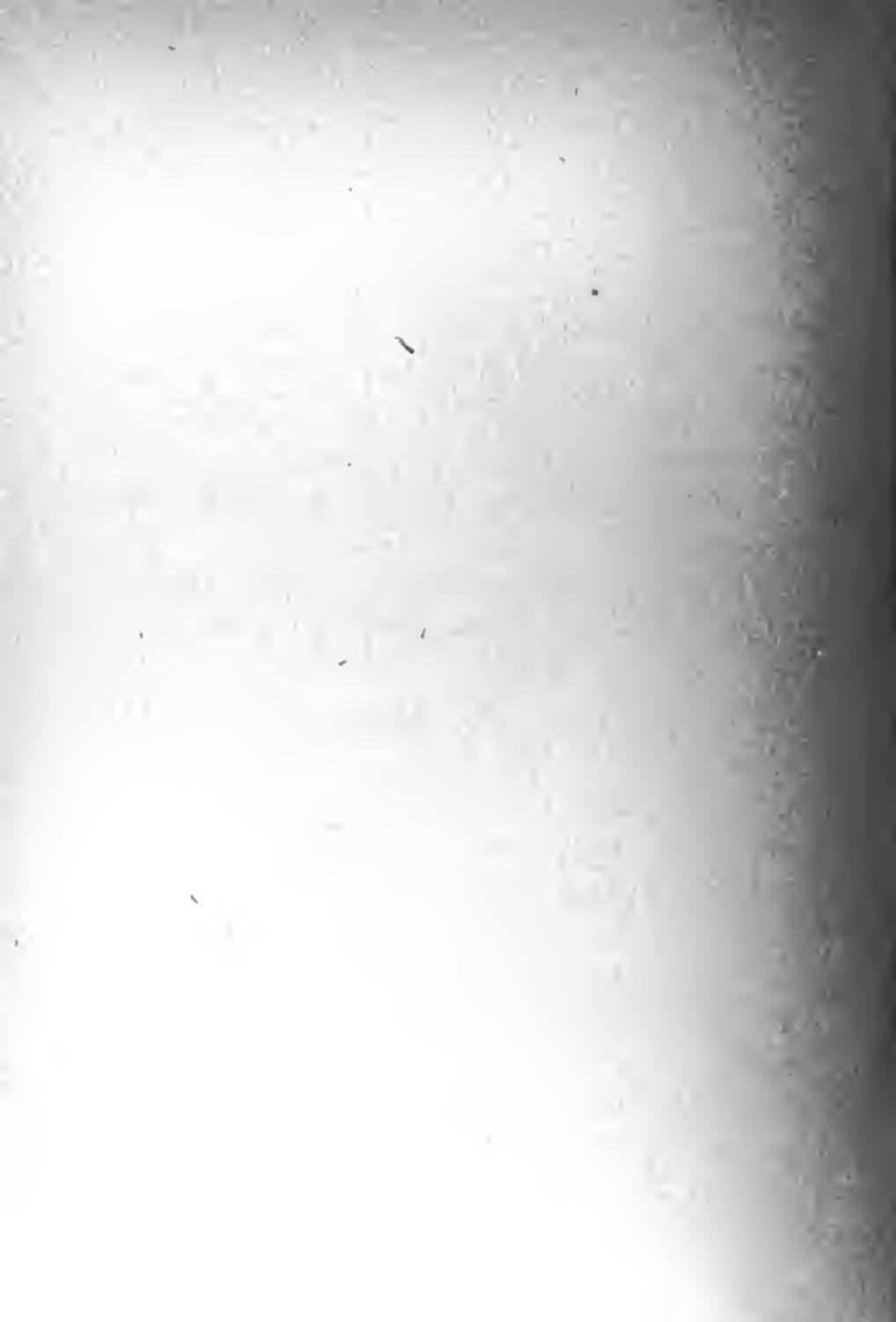
Toward the evening of the third day I had completed a new spiral of the ascent. I stood once more on a projecting ledge that jutted over the depths, just above the two ledges on which I had stood the preceding days. I took up a stone and hurled it with all my strength in front of me, but although the incline of the mountain seemed to me to be almost perpendicular, it struck the crags. I saw that people moved about in the bottom of the valley, and

fancied I could detect by their attitudes that they had observed me. But whether they waved a greeting or a threat I could not be sure, they were as small as if they were seen through the wrong end of a glass. One of them crawled up the mountain's side, up the same path as I had come, and he seemed to me no bigger than an ant. But whether it was a greeting or a threat, or whether the climber intended to follow me, or drag me down again, I heeded not. My chest grew light in the mountain air, and my head was clear. Clouds glided over the depths of the valley and all that it held, and my gaze rested upon the sun-tipped snow peak of the mountain, thither where the path led.

Fourth day towards evening. . . .



XXIV.



IT was Sunday in Springtime, and the singing in the Church floated out over the town. Up in the elm tree that stood behind the churchyard wall sat two old crows.

"Now the minister ascends the pulpit," said the one.

"What is he saying?" exclaimed the other.

The two old crows cocked their heads on one side and listened.

"Brothers in Christ!" sounded the minister's voice out from the Church. "So saith the Lord: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; he that believeth in me shall live. . . ."

"Who is the Lord?" asked the old mother crow.

"That is the great blackcoat in whose service all the little blackcoats are," answered father crow.

"What are they doing in there now? It strikes me it's very quiet."

Father crow hopped a few branches lower, bent his head, and peeped in through the Church window.

"The minister is standing taking snuff, and the people are sitting on the benches nodding their heads.—The Lord save us! if I don't believe the whole crowd are asleep."

Then the two old crows chuckled and were answered a hundredfold from the town, as the whole swarm flapped up from the elm wood and circled about the Church, making such an infernal row that the congregation started up out of their comfortable Sunday sleep, and the minister recollected himself. But the flock of crows flew away across the fields, and soon the people nodded again on their benches, and the minister's voice sounded once more: "Brethren in Christ, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; he that believeth on me shall live, even if he were dead. . . ."

"This is getting soporific!" interjected the father crow, who had flown up to his old perch.

"It is the spring air that takes from one's strength," replied the crow mother.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to have a little forenoon nap, eh?"

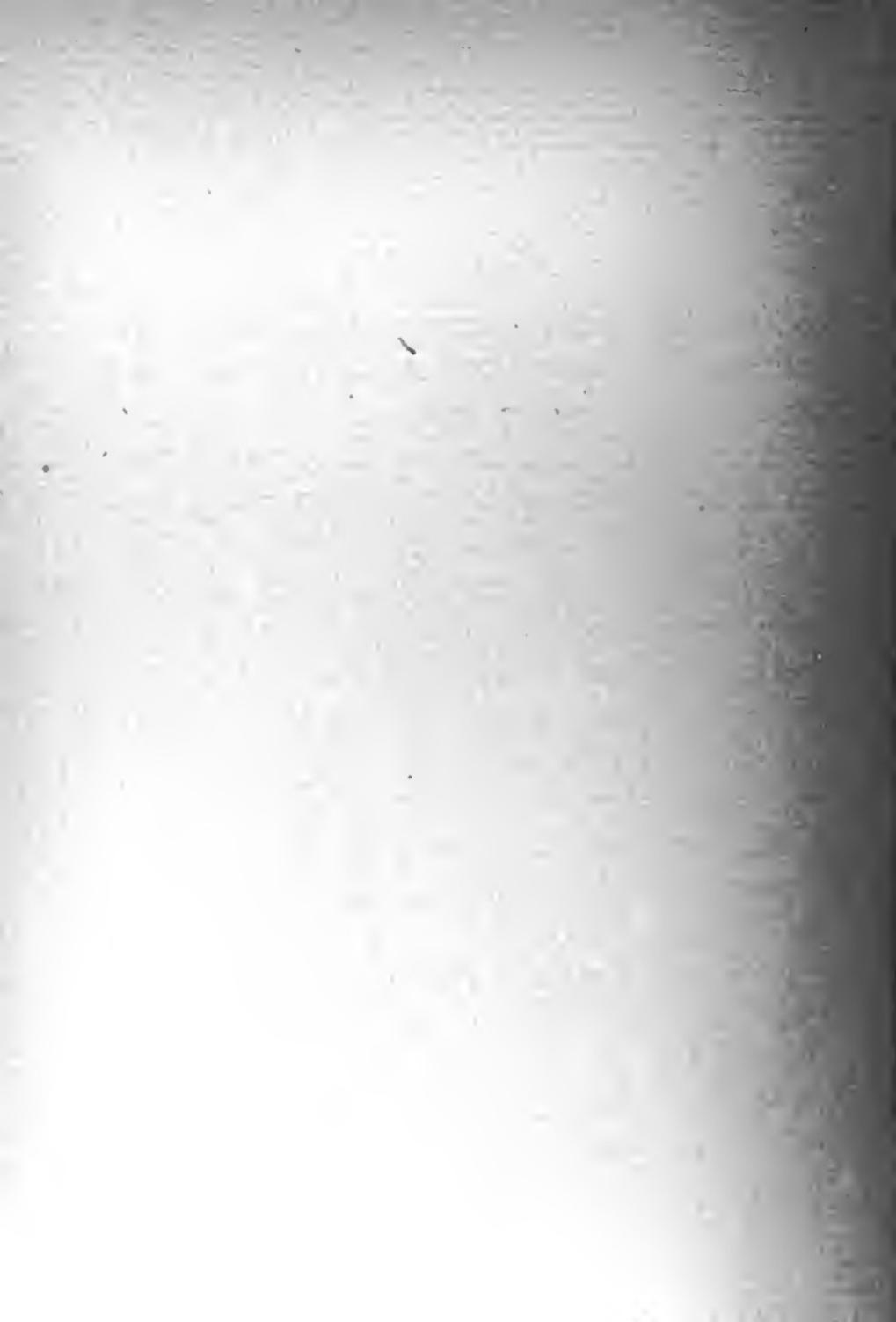
"... So it pleased the Lord," echoed the minister's voice from the Church; and the two old crows put their bills under their wings and slept. Now not a single sound was to be heard save the minister's voice, as for the third time it echoed through the Sabbath quiet: "Brothers in Christ, so saith the Lord; I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. . . ."

But now the minister leaves quarter of mile of road between the words, so that he has lost the truth out of sight when at length he reaches the life, and is obliged to wash the dust out of his throat with a glass of water. But the sun shone high in the heavens. He just cast a sly look through the Church window, and when he perceived the blessed old peace that reigned in the Temple he could not but laugh. But then, as if by magic, the drowsy Church was decked with all the glory of the flowers of Spring, and the elm top where the old crow pair were enjoying their forenoon siesta drew a green veil over its barrenness.



XXV.

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ONE day lately I sat myself on the King's highway in order to study the animal *Lepus bipedes* in its various species.

First came a middle-aged man of the lower classes. I enveloped him in darkness, for fear is like a snail that keeps in its shell by daylight, and only creeps out in the dark. The prescription worked immediately. Soon the wayfarer halted, listened breathlessly, and stared with wide open eyes into the gloom, then took to his heels again, panting and out of breath; he was frightened of himself, he groaned when a twig snapped under his feet, and he ducked down when a bird stirred in the branches over his head.

Afterwards, when I blew away the darkness, and the broad daylight suddenly surrounded him again, he looked about him with bewildered gaze, mopped the sweat off his brow and slunk shamefacedly along the wall.

"That was the child afraid of the dark," said I to myself.

But from the same direction as came the vanished one, a host of Christian men and women drew near. They all looked as if they were paid criminals weighted by a bad conscience. If one of them laughed his laugh ended in a ghostly grimace, as if he had suddenly called to mind that man should never laugh. When one of the men cast a sly glance at a woman both squinted heavenwards as if to make sure that an illicit action were not being recorded. When a cock lured his hen into the bushes a look of dismay gathered upon their faces, and they crossed themselves hurriedly.

"Those were the sick ones," said I to myself, "whose souls are infected with ideas of sin. They have manufactured them into spectacles through which the world looks distorted and gloomy, until at length they have separated their maimed conscience from its being, placed it outside themselves, endowed it with body and name, made it into their table of the

law, their master, calling it morals, God. They belong to the great category of the cowardly, for they dare not rely upon themselves, and the word self-esteem has a hollow sound or is a dangerously carnal idea; but they are cowards because their soul is diseased and their brain is narrow. Their cowardice is stupidity.

Then a third type of *Lepus bipedes* approached. He seemed to be one of those persons of whom an even twelve go to the dozen. He walked carefully along the wall, as if he were obliged to consider something at every step he took, something to be taken into consideration, an obligation to be fulfilled, a mistake to be avoided. He examined every stone carefully before he trod upon it, as if there was always a chance of getting a corn through it. He scattered smiles to the right and to the left, to every one and no one, as if he fancied it might serve him some way sooner or later. Constant little waves of fear trembled across his face, as if he suddenly remembered that he had by chance done

something he ought not to have done; and when I made a row on purpose, he started and the first expression on his face was fear, and this first expression betrayed uncertainty as to how he should conduct himself: either cringe before a master, or bully a subordinate. Then I said to myself:—

“This is the Simon Pure of cowards. For his cowardice is not child-like want of judgment, neither is it disease, neither is it stupidity. He is the most cowardly of cowards, the scurviest of all, for he trades on his cowardice. He is cowardly from expediency. He is cowardly for sheer cowardice.”

XXVI.



MY street was tightly packed with people, and the windows of the houses were thronged with faces. All wore masks, and all flung abusive epithets at me ; and these foul terms sprang up like nettles between the paving stones, through which my feet were forced to wade, and they hung out of the windows in thorny garlands.

The mid-day sun sat aloft in the vault of heaven white with heat. I had been wandering from early morning, and as far as I could see before me the street lay just as tightly packed with people with masks upon their faces ; the horizon was covered with them like swarms of blowflies.

So I halted and dried the sweat of my brow and said, "Ye slanderers, take off your masks ! Ye nettle stingers, why do you hide your countenances ? Whom are ye, and what do ye look like ? I know ye not at all, I have never seen ye.

"Thou who screechest that I have evil disease,
dost thou carry red blisters on thine own face?
Ye who shriek that I see all things askew, do
perhaps not your own eyes squint like the
wings of a weather vane? Ye whom I never
see, but whose raven's croak I hear inside the
gloomy rooms, do you croak mayhap because
I shall some day seize the spoil that never
was yours, although ye stand right in the
sunshine. I know not, I have never seen ye.

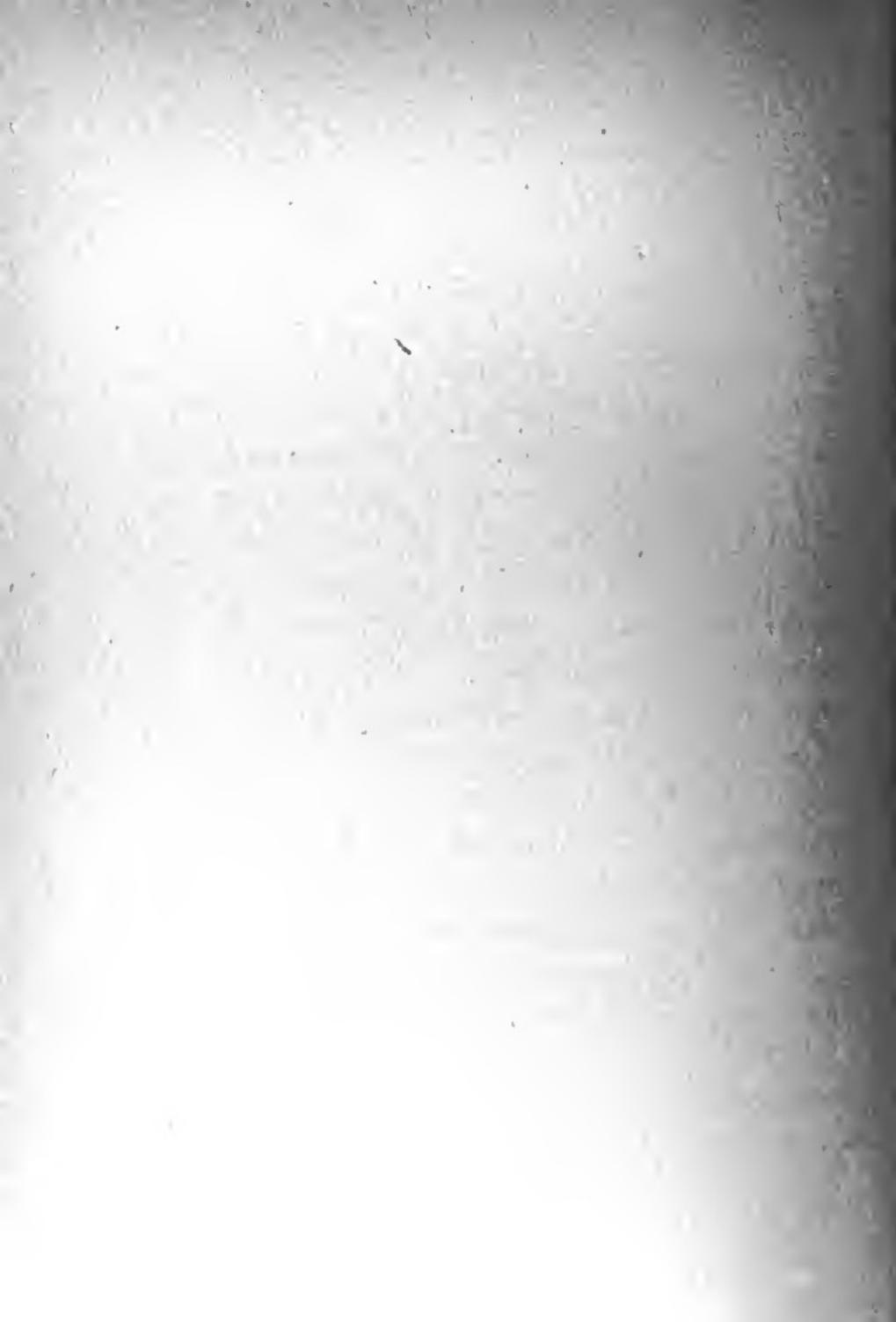
"But now ye shall hear! What avails it that
ye plant nettles in my path? I wade through
them with my bare feet and they sting me not.
What matters it that ye hurl your evil thoughts
after me like evil-smelling, rotten eggs? They
never reach me. They rebound to yourselves,
and squirt their impurity in your own eyes.
Just look! I grip handfuls of these thorny
branches and they never even prick me.

"And now ye shall hear! Why you
occupy the throne, why? He lies, ye say,
he is ashamed to own how sorely he is hurt.
Oh you blowfly brood, there is only one
thing exceeds your malice,—your stupidity,

your inconceivable, boundless, elephant-footed stupidity. You can't understand that it was you yourselves who turned aside the point of the thorns. If you had never donned masks I might have met a worthy face and looked in honest eyes, then my feet would have swelled up and my body been as full of prickles as a hedgehog's; but now you stand there with masks before your features, or hide yourselves in dark rooms, and *therefore* your nettles are but a verdant mass that strikes softly and coolly to my naked feet."



XXVII.



I STOOD under a large tree that grew in solitude far out in the deserted plain, seeking the coolness of its shade from the summer heat. I was just about to throw myself upon the ground beneath it when I heard a rustling over my head. As I gazed upwards I saw the branches thickly covered with five hundred thousand gleaming objects. At first I thought they were peacocks, but suddenly five hundred thousand mouths began to speak with human voices, and when my eyes became accustomed to the gloom I discovered five hundred thousand women's faces, and I knew that these were the women of the country. Then I doffed my cap and made my most courteous bow, and began to pay my respects thus:—

“Ye hothouse plants and ornamental wenches !”

At this a tremendous cackle arose, and one

hundred thousand lifted their wings and flapped hurriedly away across the plain.

I continued :—

“ Not Solomon in all his splendour was clad as one of ye.”

Then the four hundred thousand that remained behind held their heads askew and fanned with their peacocks’ tails, and simpered with such syrup and sugar in their gaze that it simply turned up and down in my stomach, and I added :—

“ But man cannot bed with a peacock’s tail, and it would be just as disgusting as with a . . .”

Then four hundred thousand flapped their wings and three hundred thousand gleaming tails streamed out over the plain.

“ But if one is to be found who will stand by my side when the mad bull comes rushing towards us — he who was formerly called Profanum Vulgus, but whom men now dub L’opinion—and who would feel her heart swell with a proud joy at staring into the white of the beast’s eyes, so that he would slink aside with shame—if one such is to be found—so . . .”

But, already, before I had ended my harangue, the tree over my head was vacant, and far down on the horizon a spot glittered in the sunshine, which I supposed was the last hundred thousand peacocks' tails.



XXVIII.



THE town of my birth was one of the oldest in the country, it made the same impression on me as a good description of the moyen-age. The streets were winding and narrow, the houses a dirty yellow, with two storeys, of which the upper jutted out above the under in the true mediæval style. The children played in the gutter-stone, and the cattle cropped the weeds in the market place.

One day I went out for a walk. My thoughts flew low as swifts before rain cometh. And some place, I knew not where, a voice lurked, seeking to call something to me, what I knew not, only that it came thundering down I knew not where from. At the market-place my friend the locksmith stood at the entry leading to his garret, dozing in the sunshine.

“Answer me a question,” I begged of him.
“Why does one yearn for the snow when one »

sits in the midst of flowers, for verdure and summer tidings when the sea is ice-bound ? Why is that which man possesses without worth, and why does one yearn just for the thing one lacks ? Why do the lovely harmonies of rural solitude haunt us in the midst of the city noise, and why does life and its motley flash before us with ever fresh delights, a *fata morgana* of Paradise, luring us away from peaceful dreaming in meadows green ? Why do we yearn forward or backward in hope or remembrance ? ”

My friend the locksmith answered never a word, but, chuckling to himself, swung round on his heel and entered his house.

When I reached the principal street, my friend the rabbit breeder stood on his steps, that jutted out over the foot-walk, playing the concertina.

“ Answer me a question,” I besought him. “ Suppose you found out that those who hold the reins of Government in our town emptied their slops into your and your neighbours’ wells, would you go up to the market-

place and tell it to all the people, even if you knew that they would raze your house and violate your wife and put you yourself in the pillory?"

My friend answered never a word; he only laughed in embarrassment, struck up a waltz on his concertina and began to dance.

But, down in Mob Alley, my friend the cobbler sat at his open window,—a family idyl,—wife and eight children.

"Answer me a question," I prayed him. "If a person came to you and said roughly: Better anything else than sitting here like this till the day of judgment; better the great sorrow than the petty joy; rather the trouble that turns hair grey in one night than happiness in the chimney corner, listening to the coffee-kettle singing—if a person came to you and said that, what reply would you give him?"

My friend answered never a word; he merely shut the window and turned his back to it.

As for me, I walked down the Alley, and

out through the town gates, with their look of mediæval times; and when evening fell and I turned round, the Church tower of my native town gleamed far away in the evening sun.

XXIX.



I HAD crossed the great morass, and was wandering on the opposite shore in the midst of manifold flowers, and in a sunshine the like of which I had never felt before. But beyond the morass my foes were gathered in a fog, as orange-green as gall, and they threatened and called :—

“ You need not crow ! Don’t you think we did not see that you got help ? If strange hands had not stretched forth to you, you would be lying in the bottom of the morass by this time, there where we would like to see you, and where you ought to be.”

Then I answered :—

“ The evil smell of your words reaches me even here, from your heart and your mind’s corruption. Ye only know one way to thank,—lackey’s way,—bend to the dust, kiss hands meekly, and let your words trickle like syrup. What do you know of the silent thanks that

holds the kernel and marrow of a human soul in one look, or that this look has something of the look of youth when it loves, and something of a child's look up to its mother, but before all, that it is of a piece with the look with which two who were lost in a desert fall into one another's arms when they meet unexpectedly ; solitary and remote from other human beings.

"Therefore, go home to your porridge platters, gorge yourselves, and thank your God in the one way you know how to thank,—lackey's way,—bend to the dust, kiss hands meekly, and let your words trickle like syrup."

XXX.



As the evening sun was poised above the crest of the mountain in the west like a great red globe, I descended to a meadow that teemed with human forms. They looked like men, and yet I knew not if I could call them by this name. At first sight the scene appeared as if a carnival were taking place; afterwards I fancied that I found myself in the walled enclosure of a madhouse. One wanted a sleeve to his coat, another had only *one* leg to his trousers. The one whose head was as big as an elephant had a toy cap, whilst his neighbour, on whose body nature had clapped a pin head, stalked about with a headgear of gigantic dimensions. There were coats so long that they reached to the knee, and trousers so short that they finished there. Goliath-like feet limped about in dancing pumps, and wading boots slopped about children's tiny feet. But all moved about, they never stood still a

moment, the whole meadow was like a single teeming ant-heap. They all seemed to be seeking, as if they had lost something, or as if they knew not themselves for what they were searching ; every head was bent forward, every body bowed, eagerness glistened in every eye, and their faces surrounded me like embodied groans. Yet not a sound was to be heard, not one of their steps ; it seemed to me as if all these monsters were in such a desperate hurry that they could not even pause to breathe, or as if they were holding their breaths as a person frightened at the dark.

In the meantime I had crossed right over the plain. The sun had gone down behind the mountain, and the coolness of night was falling. On a stone near the wall, at some distance from the rest of the crowd, an old man sat alone. His clothes were one mass of rags, and as I came in sight he made a violent effort to wrap them better round him, for his elbows and knee-bones stuck out through the holes as the pointed twigs of a tree.

I halted and asked :—

"Tell me, old man, who are these crowds in the plain, and why have they clothed themselves like unto lunatics? And why do you sit here now when the night dews are falling?"

And the old man bared his bald head, and lifted his hollowed and sightless eye up to me, and said:—

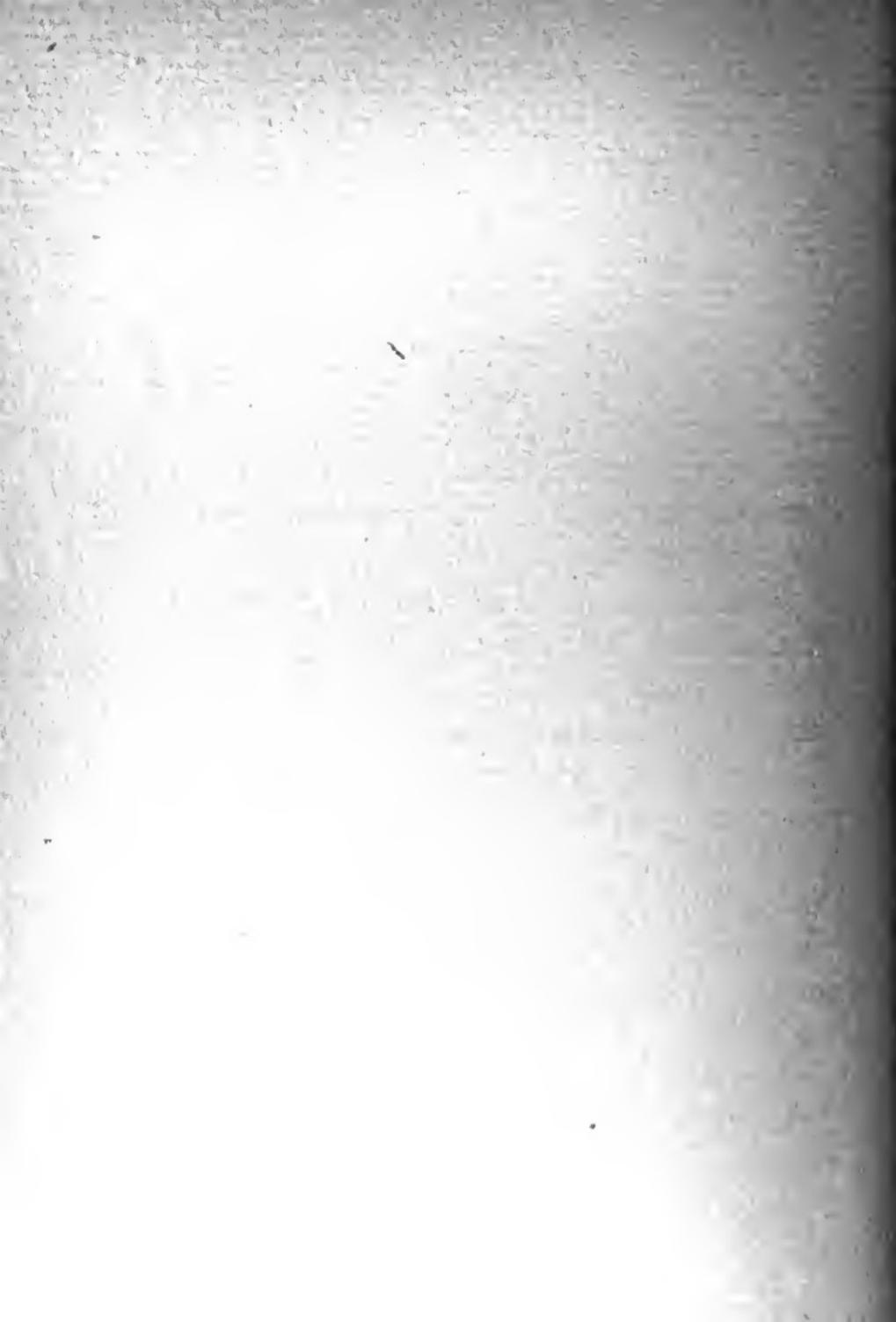
"They are mankind looking for their lives. There are as many kinds of lives as there are people, and every life is a scourge that is unique of its kind, as every man is a being that is sole of his kind. Everything is awry, no one has got the scourge he ought to have, everyone is looking for one to suit him.

"You ask why I sit here now that the cool of night is falling. Therefore, young man, that I have jumped about as the others are jumping, until my legs gave way, and the hair fell off my head, and my eyes lost their sight. I desired my proper life, I too; but what I got, it was never other than these rags."

Then terror seized me, and I continued my way up amongst the mountains. And the darkness gathered closely over the plain, but

although I could scarcely hear or see, I was conscious through other inner secret senses of the death-dance in search of life that was footing it restlessly under me; and when morning came, and the sun ran up above the sea, my soul was filled with the desire for strength to walk through life as the man of antiquity in his toga.

XXXI.



I DESCENDED into the great road that runs round the world. The windows in the houses were shut, and gleaming eyes peered through the closed shutters. The sun weltered upon my head, the paving stones burnt under my feet, the air about me smothered me as in a blanket.

When I got a piece down the street the houses were uninhabited. Above the entrance to each house hung a nightcap and a pair of hobbles. Watchmen stood at the doors. I stopped at the bottom of some steps, greeted the man at the door, and said :—

“ I want a house, for the mid-day sun is very hot, and I am a-weary, and all my friends sit by this time in the midst of children and flowers, so why shouldn’t I, even I, have a house of my own ? ”

The man laughed at that with a laugh I did not understand, and answered :—

“ You are right, why shouldn’t even you have

your house? You ought to have this house. But first you must go to the market-place, and take part in the divine service of the people."

I went away to the market-place, where I found a great congregation lying flat on their stomachs under invocation to a mock sun that shone faintly up in the sky. This sight disgusted me, and I turned back. When I got down again into the great street that ran round the world, I saw the man at the door from afar laughing at me with the same laugh that I could not interpret.

"Now you are at liberty to enter the house and possess it as your own. Let me first fasten the hobbles to your feet and put the nightcap on your head."

And as he said it he laughed again, and suddenly I saw right through this obscure speech, and caught sight of the worm that wriggled underneath it. I knew his breed only too well ; he belonged to the great race of the malicious who delight in kill-joy.

Then I shook the hobble off my foot and struck the cap out of the man's hand and

flung it in his face, and turned aside off the great road that runs about the world and that uncoiled itself before me like a giant white worm sequestered, with the uncleanness of a monster.



XXXII.



THERE is one day in the year that I pass by with blinking eyes : my birthday ; then if I were to look up I should see how life's chain uncoils, and I should be able to count the links.

There is one hour in the twenty-four that works in my soul and leaves a taste in my mouth more acrid than any medicine : the hour when I lay myself to sleep, for I know that during the night that evil happens that can never be shriven ; that *that* vanishes that once vanished can never return ; and when I awake in the middle of the night I hear time roll on, rushing through the darkness above my head like a mighty stream.

When I read in books of the one's growing loneliness and the other's poorness of life ; and when I look round amongst the people about me, and see how the years of all fall from them like badly-kept teeth ; when I

myself gaze back over the landscape that I have wandered over, to find wild places and nettle woods—then I recognise the species of the sin that is the root and original source. Let not your days be as rotten fruits, which you must cast on the dung-heap behind you or as poisonous wormwood, flowering in your spirit; but make them shining white as the bodies of young virgins, and clothe them in gold and silver, that they may constantly watch round your couch as guardian spirits, fanning refreshing coolness over your soul. May your serving-flock suffice to attend you through each cycle of the sun.

XXXIII.



WHEN I go to the town and people stare and gape in the market and street, it is a habit of mine never to drop my eyes without looking at each and every man. I have often noticed that the one sneaked by me and the other looked meaningly at his neighbour, and that they all mumbled something under their breath, but I knew not if it was about me, and I would not touch their dirty burdens. But once lately I got a long yellow-green look that I held in the palm of my hand for examination; but before I could test this disgusting expression in the crucible of my thoughts, I heard a voice speaking close to me.

“ He harbours the devil of pride.”

Then I turned round and saw him who had cast the yellow-green look, and who had spoken the words. He turned his back to me quickly, but he could not conceal how his clothes hung bedaubed with the yellow-green stuff. And I went close up behind his neck and said :—

" You who turn away with the idea of concealing that you soiled yourself with the vomit of your own mind, listen now to me ! What is it that you say about pride ? What do *you* know about pride ? You only know *one* kind of pride, your own and that of the like of you. That which inflates the soul with wind, without being able to hinder it from collapsing suddenly, as soon as any one points a finger towards it. You know the low vulgar pride, the dastard pride that sticks its nose in the air—whilst inwardly a spirit of shame sits in you, and gnaws at you and fleers at you, so that as you walk along you stumble over a stone or fall into a ditch. Your pride is not genuine, you wear it as a bargee would wear the dress of a knight, you strut with it with as ill a grace as if you had donned a decoration, knowing in your soul that you deserved it not ; that is why you feel conscious of being ludicrous, and why you are ashamed.

" Why then do you speak of pride, you who know no other than your own and that of your equals ? What do you know of the true, great

pride, that which surpasses all other feeling upon earth, that which rings like true metal and makes the brow as clear and as open as the sea on a sunshine day. That is the pride that he who casts malignant looks about him, and who cringes when threatened with words more offensive than the lashes that fall upon the back of a slave—will never know. For *that* pride is the one that makes a man dare to pit his stubborn *no* against every yes, and kick over the old ideals as if they were potsherds and puffballs. Why do you speak of pride? you have never conceived what it feels like to *be* proud. Get you to your trading in the market-place, and your gossip at the street corner, but never seek to imprison the sunshine in your fist.

“Pride is a haughty virgin who loves alone a noble knight, with casque, and plume, and coat of mail.”

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